

John's Gospel - the Light of the World

by John Vissers

In this sermon, John Vissers explores Jesus' declaration as the light of the world, emphasizing its significance for faith and life in contrast to darkness.

Duration: 35:33

Scripture: Genesis 1:3-4, Psalm 27:1, Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12

Topics: "Gospel Of John"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a little boy who couldn't remember his line during a performance. His mother, sitting in the front row, whispered his line to him, but he mistakenly said that his mother is the light of the world. The speaker then transitions to a story from the French Revolution, where political prisoners were kept in dark dungeons. One prisoner had a few pages from a Bible and would read them in the brief moments of light that entered the dungeon. The speaker relates these stories to the concept of Jesus being the light of the world, offering hope and guidance in the darkness of our lives.

Transcript

We're back in the Gospel of John tonight, and I invite you to turn to the 8th chapter of John's Gospel, where we're going to read from verse 12 through to the end of verse 30. John chapter 8, verse 12, through to the end of verse 30. Hear the Word of God.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. The Pharisees challenged Him, Here you are, appearing as your own witness.

Your testimony is not valid. Jesus answered, Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid. For I know where I came from and where I am going.

But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards. I pass judgment on no one.

But if I do judge, my decisions are right because I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent me. In your own law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.

I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the one who sent me, the Father. Then they asked Him, Where is your Father? You do not know me or my Father, Jesus replied.

If you knew me, you would know my Father also. He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized Him because His time had not yet come.

Once more Jesus said to them, I am going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come. This made the Jews ask, Will He kill Himself? Is that why He says, Where I go you cannot come? But He continued, You are from below, I am from above.

You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be. You will indeed die in your sins.

Who are you? they asked. Just what I have been claiming all along, Jesus replied. I have much to say in judgment of you.

But He who sent me is reliable and what I have heard from Him I tell the world. They did not understand that He was telling them about His Father. So Jesus said, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

The One who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone for I always do what pleases Him. Even as He spoke, many put their faith in Him.

Amen. And may God bless to us this reading from His Word this evening. Let's pray together, shall we? Father, we thank You tonight for Your Word which is a light for us and a lamp for us.

Guide us, we pray, as we open Your Word. Speak to us that indeed we might have a fresh understanding and we might see Jesus the light of the world. In whose name we pray.

Amen. One of my favorite stories is one that I've told before and it's a wonderful story about a little boy who was on one occasion to take part in a Sunday school pageant. And all of the children had memorized their part.

All of them had been asked to say, to speak, to give one of the sayings of Jesus. And this particular little boy was, when his time came, he was to say, I am the light of the world. This saying from John chapter 8. Well, the time came for his big part.

And every eye was fixed on him and he froze in his place. He couldn't remember his line and he kind of stood there not knowing what to do. His mother, fortunately, was sitting in the front row and so she kind of leaned forward and whispered, I am the light of the world.

And still nothing came to his mind. Nothing came across his face. He just stood there in fear, paralyzed.

So she said it a little louder. I am the light of the world. And still nothing came to his mind.

Nothing came to his face. He stood there paralyzed and finally his mother said, a little louder, leaning forward just a little bit more, I am the light of the world. And suddenly, the little boy's face just lit up.

And he stood with confidence and he opened his mouth and he said, my mother is the light of the world. Well, if you're a little boy, I suppose, or even a little girl, your mother often would be the light of your world. In John chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus gives us this well-known saying, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Now as we think together into this text, one of the things that we need to understand, of course, is that the theme of light is one of the great themes of the Gospel of John. And we've seen this as we've made our way through the Gospel of John.

This theme of light just shines. It shines like the shaft of light, if you will, right through the very heart, right through the very center of the entire Gospel. If you go back to John chapter 1, where we started way back last year, it's already introduced in the Johannine prologue.

If you turn back just a few pages. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. Verse 4, in Him was life, and that life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. And then John goes on, the Gospel writer, to introduce John the Baptist and makes the point, of course, that John the Baptist was not the light, but that he came as a testimony, that he came as one to bear witness to the light, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. And so it starts already there in John 1, and it winds its way through the entire Gospel.

Think ahead a little bit more from John 1 to John 3. Do you remember after Jesus had this conversation with Nicodemus? Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, and we have the great Gospel text in John 3.16, for God so loved the world. And then in verse 19, this is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Verse 20, everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. And then a little bit later in the passage after we've read this evening in John 9, verse 5, Jesus says, while I am in the world, I am the light of the world. And then in John 12, verse 46, Jesus says, I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.

And these are just but four or five of the places where we find this theme of light in the Gospel of John, but it's there everywhere. And in a very real sense, John 8 and verse 12 now is the pinnacle. Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And of course, you need to remember that the other theme that contrasts with this in the Gospel of John is the theme of night, of darkness. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night.

It's very symbolic. Judas, after he eats with the disciples, after he eats with Jesus and he goes out to betray Jesus, John the Gospel writer says, it was night. And so you've got, in a very real sense, Jesus being portrayed as the light of the world with the darkness of sin and the night descending upon Him.

And so whenever you see Jesus speaking about the cross and the night coming, it's in this context. Now this language, of course, in John's Gospel, shouldn't surprise us at all. Because the theme of light is also a very rich image from the Old Testament.

It's an image that shouldn't catch us off guard. If you go right back to Genesis, Genesis chapter 1, which is really a parallel to John chapter 1, we read, God said, let there be light. And there was light.

And God saw that the light was good and He separated the light from the darkness. Or you think about the Exodus as the people of God, as the covenant people are freed from their bondage and freed from their slavery. They're led on their journey through the wilderness.

How? By a cloud. By a pillar of cloud and fire. They were, in a very real sense, marching in God's light as God led them into the promised land.

Or think of the rich imagery of the psalmist. Throughout the Psalms, you find the rich image of light. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Or think of the prophet Isaiah, who said that the coming of the Kingdom of God would be a time when the servant of the Lord would be as a light for the Gentiles. That He may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Isaiah 49 and verse 6. Or Isaiah 60.

The prophet says that God Himself will be a light for His people. Even the prophet Zechariah picks up this rich theme and he describes the coming of the Lord as a time when the light would shine and when the water would flow and the Lord would reign over all the earth. And so you have this richness of Old Testament imagery.

And it's picked up by the Gospel writer John. And here in John 8, verse 12, you have Jesus saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Now this pinnacle really, this high point of the theme of light in the Gospel of John appears when Jesus is in the Feast of Tabernacles, when He's in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. He's standing in the temple of Jerusalem. And it's still the Feast of Tabernacles which we've been considering through chapter 7 and through chapter 8. And just to be reminded, the Feast of the Tabernacles is the Jewish holiday which commemorates the wanderings of the Jewish people in the desert.

And during the celebration, they remembered the faithfulness of God. They remembered how God had been faithful to them, how God had led them. And they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Savior.

They looked forward to the One who would come to deliver them. And one of the great moments in the Feast as we saw a little while ago was the pouring out of the water. And as the water was poured out, so Jesus in John 7 and verse 37 claimed to fulfill that part of the ritual and said, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

And so it's in that context that Jesus calls Himself, He claims to be the water of life who alone can quench our thirsting souls. But the Feast of the Tabernacles also had another great symbol. At the end of the first day and every day thereafter, four golden lampstands were lit in the temple.

And they were lit amidst great rejoicing. They were lit as people sang, as they celebrated, as they danced, and the celebration continued through every night of the feast. And the light in the temple in Jerusalem illuminated the whole city.

It lit up all of Jerusalem. All of Jerusalem knew that this was a time of celebration, that this was a feast, that this was a holy day. It was the center of attention.

And so you can imagine as these lamps are being lit or as they are burning brightly there in the temple, in this great feast, in this great celebration, in this great festival of lights, it's in that context that Jesus stands in the temple and He says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. You see, Jesus is saying that at the end of this feast, at the end of this festival, the lights will be extinguished.

The celebration will cease. The holiday, the holy day, will be over. But I am the light that goes on forever.

And if you follow Me, you will never walk in darkness again, for you will have the light of life. It's with that sense, that richness, the richness of the image and in the context in which Jesus spoke these words that we need to understand what Jesus is really saying here because this is a rich image and it is a startling claim and it contains a wonderful promise. And I want us to look at the text in v. 12 a little more carefully.

We're going to focus on v. 12 this evening to see particularly what Jesus is saying here and how it applies to us, to our lives, for our faith today. First of all, notice that Jesus begins by simply saying, I am the light of the world. And in the first place, I want to suggest to you that this statement reveals something about the person of Jesus.

It reveals something about the identity of Jesus. In the context of the Feast of the Tabernacles, of course, Jesus is saying that He is the fulfillment of all that this feast celebrates. All that this feast commemorates.

The people of God had been led out of darkness, out of bondage, out of slavery, through the darkness of the wilderness into the glorious light of the promised land. And they were led by the light of God. They were led forward by God's light in their lives.

And we saw that the prophets pointed to the coming of the Lord as a great time of light for the nation of Israel. And what the lights of this feast symbolize, what they point to, Jesus fulfills. He is saying, I am the light of God's presence in your midst.

I am the light of God's presence in the world. I am the one who comes to pierce the darkness. What the prophets predicted, I fulfill.

I am the promised Messiah sent to bring the light of salvation. But I want you to notice another aspect of this particular saying. Because there's more to this saying than Jesus just appealing to this image of the light.

Notice that he says, I am the light of the world. Now this is one of the great I am sayings in the Gospel of John. A number of times in John's Gospel, Jesus refers to Himself by using this phrase, I am.

You know some of them. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the bread of life.

I am the way and the truth and the life. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the door.

I am the true vine. And a little later in John's Gospel, chapter 8, around verses 58 and 59, we'll see that Jesus brings this saying to its height, to its fulfillment, when He says before Abraham was, I am. And here in verse 12, He says, I am the light of the world.

Now we need to understand that these two little words mean everything in the Gospel of John because they are emphatic. The Greek here is a go, a me, and it literally should be translated in this way, I, I am. And we're reminded then as Jesus utters these words, not simply of the light in the wilderness, not simply

of all of the rich imagery of light in the Old Testament, but we are reminded of the experience of Moses in Exodus 3, where he sees a burning bush and he goes to investigate it and he hears a voice.

And the voice tells him that he is to go and lead the people of Israel out of slavery and into the promised land. And he asks, who shall I say sent me? Why ought they to believe me? And God says, tell them that I Am has sent you. I Am has sent you to liberate, to set the people free.

And this, of course, becomes one of the covenant names. It becomes the covenant name of God. And Jesus here is identifying Himself with this covenant name, the name of Jehovah, the name of Yahweh.

I Am who I Am. I Am who I always have been. And I Am who I always will be.

I Am the Eternal One. I Am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. I Am the true light.

The eternal light that comes into this world of darkness. And I will shine, not simply for a season, not simply for a time, but forever. I Am the One who said, let there be light.

And there was light. I Am the One who will shine in the heavenly cities so that there will be no need of light by day or night. Now when you understand this saying of Jesus in this way, it is an astonishing claim.

And it's a claim, of course, which the Pharisees cannot accept. In verse 13, the Pharisees challenged Him. Here you are, they say, appearing as your own witness.

Your testimony is not valid. They challenge Jesus. They say what you are saying.

They recognize, of course, the power, the astonishing claim of what Jesus is saying, what He is making here. But they say this cannot be true since you are bearing witness to yourself. And this is a fundamental objection, of course, to the I Am statement.

Because in presenting Himself this way, Jesus is saying I, I Am, I need no other reality to authenticate who I am. I don't need to appeal to a higher authority. There is no authority outside of me or beyond me which justifies this claim other than the fact that He points to His Father.

His relationship with God, His Father. And He says, really, if I am the Son of the living God, I am the Son of the living God. I am who I am.

I am the true light of the world. This is not something subject to human judgment. It doesn't rely on the reasoning of the world.

It's the way of the kingdom. If Jesus is the Son of God, then the testimony He gives on His own behalf is valid. It is self-authenticating.

Nothing else can convince the religious leaders. Either they will accept Jesus, or they won't. Either the light shines, or it doesn't.

And, of course, later in the passage He points out that as the light of the world, the darkness will descend upon Him as He is lifted up on the cross to die. He speaks about His mission. He speaks about His relationship to His Father.

These are the realities that authenticate His identity. And so when we come and we bump up against this saying I am the light of the world, we bump up against the claims of Jesus. The claims that we find throughout the Gospel.

When everything is said and done, you see, when all of the arguments are made, when you've analyzed it from this angle and from that angle, the fundamental question is what are you going to do with Jesus? And we've come up against this again and again and again in John's Gospel. That's how Jesus is presented here. He is who He says He is, or He's not.

And no appeal to a human judgment, no appeal to a human argument in the end is going to persuade you. Your back is up against the wall. You are left with Jesus.

What are you going to do with Him? Then secondly, notice that Jesus goes on very briefly and He says, Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness. If the first part of this statement reveals something about the person of Jesus, now we have something about the power of Jesus. When the lights were extinguished in the temple, the people once again lived in darkness.

When the people turned aside from the Lord their God in the wilderness, when they forsook the light, they lived in the darkness. They walked in the darkness. Now, we need to understand that the people who lived in Jesus' day, the people who lived in the first century, knew what darkness was about.

There were no electric lights, of course. There were no generators. There were no flashlights.

When night came, it was dark. Oh, they would build a fire for a time, but when night came, night came. And it was dark.

And of course, we don't really understand what that means. We live in a culture. We live in a world where the lights can stay on all night if we like.

We don't know what it means to live in that kind of darkness. We have lights. We have flashlights.

We have lamps. We have all kinds of things that we can use to light our way. I remember when I was a child during the 1960s, we had this tremendous blackout.

Some of you will remember it. When the power shut down from New York City across the whole eastern seaboard right up here into Toronto, all of southern Ontario and eastern Canada, the whole place was in darkness. And I can remember as a family, we were living in a small house at the time, and I can remember how we had no lights and we were there in the midst of darkness.

We had no heat. We groped around in the dark trying to find candles and flashlights. And I remember how we felt.

I remember how I felt as a child sitting in my bedroom putting my hand in front of my face and not being able to even see my hand and wondering when and if the lights would come on again. I was scared as a child living through that experience. And Jesus is saying here, if you follow me, if you follow me, whoever follows me will never have that kind of experience in their lives.

They will never walk in darkness. Many of us, of course, live our lives in the dark, not physically, but spiritually and emotionally and psychologically. Utter and absolute and overwhelming darkness at times.

The darkness of our worlds can sometimes close in around us and we may go into a depression or we may see no way out of a particular situation or we may look at the horrors of our world, the horrors of a Kosovo or a Sudan. And the darkness descends upon us, perhaps the death of a loved one, an unexpected illness, an inexplicable depression, whatever it may be. And I don't know whether you've ever had that kind of an experience, but I have when it closes in around you and it's all dark.

Every way you turn, you see nothing but darkness. No way out and you wonder, how are you ever going to persevere? How are you ever going to make it through? How are you ever going to wind your way through the darkness? And Jesus says, I come and I stand with you and I walk with you so that whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. The darkness which rattles our lives, and of course there is the darkness of sin.

If we persist in disobedience and sin when we walk in the darkness, the Bible says we continue to walk in that darkness, but if we allow the light of Christ into our lives, He brings life and we walk in His light and see His face and one day we will see Him as He is and we will not need the light of a lamp or the light of a sun, for the Lord God Himself will give us light. And then finally, this verse concludes but whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. A wonderful promise.

The power of Jesus, the person of Jesus, leads to a wonderful word of assurance, a wonderful promise. One of the effects of light, of course, is that it enables us to see. It enables us to make our way in the world.

It overcomes the darkness, and of course that's the picture that Jesus is portraying here, that the light which He is overcomes the darkness of sin in our world. But there's more than that because light has another effect. It gives life.

It enables things to grow. Light nurtures growth and without enough light, living things usually end up dying. Those of you who work with plants or have gardens or grow plants in your own homes will know that if you don't care for them properly, if they don't get adequate light, they ultimately die.

I know I've killed enough plants in my day to know that it's true. Light nurtures, nourishes life. It is life-giving.

And Jesus says, if you follow me, you will have the light of life. Does that language sound familiar? Think back to John chapter 1, verse 4. In Him was life and that life was the light of men. You see, life and light in the Gospel of John are intimately interconnected.

And those who have Christ have the light and those who have the light have life. And those who are in the life of Christ have light to make their way in a dark world. Jesus is the light of the world whose light brings life to you, who nourishes you, who nurtures you so that you can become what God intended you to be, so that your life can blossom, so that your life can flourish, so that you can bloom and be what God wants you to be where God has planted you, where He wants you to serve and follow Him and love Him.

There's a story that comes from the French Revolution. It's a story about some political prisoners, many of the political prisoners who were arrested and who were taken into prison during the French Revolution were herded into dark dungeons where they were forced to live, where they were forced to make an existence. And they lived in utter and absolute darkness without any light, day or night, no light whatsoever.

And in one of the dungeons, the story goes, a prisoner had a copy, at least some pages from a Bible. And his cell, his dungeon was crammed with other prisoners who had been rounded up and there they lived in utter and absolute darkness. Except for one brief moment, for a few moments every day, a shaft of light would come through a tiny crack in the ceiling.

And the prisoners devised a plan whereby they would lift someone onto their shoulders and into the shaft of light. And there in that position, that person would read those pages of the Scriptures which was all they had to read in this dungeon. And there in that darkness, for a few brief moments every day, Jesus became for them the light of their world.

The only light of their world. But the light which ultimately gave them life and sustained them through a horrendous and a very difficult experience. I don't know what kind of dungeon, what kind of darkness might be a part of your life this evening.

I don't know how dark is the night of your soul. But this I know. The words that Jesus spoke to the people in the temple 2,000 years ago are the same words that he speaks this evening as he stands in our midst, as he stands before you face to face.

He says to you, I am the light of the world. I can be the light of your world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.

If you follow me, you will never walk in darkness. But have the light of life. Do you know the light? Have you discovered the light in the midst of the darkness of your world? Let us pray.

Lord, many of us face all kinds of darkness, darkness perhaps of depression, darkness of illness, of challenging circumstances, but most of all, we all face the reality of the darkness of sin. And we pray, O God, that you would come. Lord Jesus, that you would come into our lives and into our hearts to lighten our lives, to light up the darkness of our souls, that even in this coming week somehow the radiance of your glory will shine from our lives, that others will know that we have a light, and that that light is Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen.

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